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Toward a Theoretical Model of the Role of Organizational Orientations and Machiavellianism on Nonverbal Immediacy Behavior and Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

The current study examined the relationships of organizational orientations and Machiavellianism with nonverbal immediacy and job satisfaction in the organizational context. Participants included 160 full-time employees who worked at various for profit or non-profit organizations in the Mid-Atlantic area. Results indicated that the organizational orientations (i.e., upward mobile, ambivalent, and indifferent) and Machiavellianism were significant predictors of employee nonverbal immediacy and job satisfaction. The results were consistent with a preliminary theoretical model of relationships among these individual differences and organizational outcomes.

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Competent organizations are concerned with fostering employee perceptions of job satisfaction. Research has consistently demonstrated that job satisfaction leads to valuable organizational outcomes such as an increase in job performance, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior (Crede, Chernyshenko, Stark, Dalal, & Bashshur, 2007; Huang & Hsiao, 2007; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Loher, Noe, Moeller, & Fitzgerald, 1985; Petty, McGee, & Cavender, 1984; Riketta, 2008). However, whether or not an employee is satisfied in the workplace is largely determined by individual differences (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006) and organizational communication behavior (Madlock, 2006, 2008; Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Two individual differences of importance in the workplace include organizational orientations and personality traits (McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2005; McCroskey, Richmond, Johnson, & Smith, 2004). Considering past research, the aim of this study was to assess individual differences (i.e., organizational orientations, Machiavellianism) as potential predictors of employee communication behavior (i.e., immediacy) and job satisfaction.

Organizational Orientations

The term “organizational orientations” refers to the various ways people approach their roles in an organization and the different approaches people have toward work and the place of work in their lives (Richmond & McCroskey, 2001). Three organizational orientations have been identified: upward mobile, indifferent, and ambivalent. The *upward mobile* orientation refers to workers who possess a strong desire to be promoted and advance within the organization. These individuals are very devoted to their career and tend to identify with the organization. Considering that much of upward mobile individuals’ lives revolve around their careers, they frequently exert the extra effort needed to be a successful employee. The *indifferent* orientation refers to workers who are committed to their jobs as a means of earning a living. These individuals are primarily concerned with their paychecks, as their lives, in their view, exist mostly outside of the workplace. Working is a necessary means of having that life, but nothing more. The *ambivalent* orientation refers to workers who tend to be highly critical of any job and seem to find problems with any organization. These individuals are quite unpredictable and never truly accept any given organization. Ambivalents tend to frequently change jobs, looking for the “perfect” organization. Management usually has no problem seeing ambivalents leave the organization.

The organizational orientations concept was advanced decades ago in the field of management (Presthus, 1962) but has just recently drawn the attention of quantitative researchers in the field of communication. McCroskey et al. (2004) conducted research that explained a great deal about the relevance of this concept to organizational communication. In their study, the researchers validated their research measures for the three organizational orientations and determined that organizational orientations are correlated with temperament variables. Canonical correlation analysis determined that the temperament variables of extroversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism were substantially correlated with the three organizational orientations. Also, organizational orientations were found to predict job satisfaction. Furthermore, McCroskey et al.

(2005) discovered that perceptions of supervisor credibility were related negatively to the indifferent and ambivalent orientations.

Machiavellianism

Another individual difference, Machiavellianism, is a trait that involves strategically manipulating others for person gain, often against the other's self-interest (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). It was conceptualized by Christie and Geis (1970), in their book *Studies In Machiavellianism*. According to Christie and Geis (1970), high Machs manipulate people to their advantage and tend to have little emotional involvement in their interpersonal relationships. Previous research gives an accurate depiction of the characteristics and predispositions of the Machiavellian individual. High Machs are less altruistic (Barber, 1994), more likely to cheat (Flynn, Reichard, & Slane, 1987), more flexible in tactic usage (Grams & Rogers, 1990), and less moral and empathetic (Padney & Singh, 1987).

Research suggests that employees possessing a Machiavellian personality have both advantages and disadvantages for them in the workplace. With respect to deception, high Machs are much less likely to be caught. Geis and Moon (1981) discovered that high Machs were more convincing liars than low Machs. High Machs were harder to judge and were believed to be telling the truth more when lying than low Machs. The flexibility of the high Mach is another advantageous characteristic. For example, high Machs with an external locus of control have been suggested to be better managers (Gable & Dangelo, 1994).

The fact that high Machs use deception to get what they desire is problematic. From a supervisor's organizational standpoint, the high Mach may appear less appealing than the low Mach. As stated before, the high Mach will be less altruistic, empathetic, and more likely to cheat. If the high Mach is perceived as this by superiors, he/she may suffer consequences. Consistent with attribution theory (Heider, 1958), high Machs tend to externalize their failures. Deception and manipulation are merely attempts to exert control over adverse conditions, and meta-analytic methodologies have suggested that high Machs have an external locus of control (Mudrack, 1990). This information denotes that having the Machiavellianism trait does not necessarily entail successful encounters concerning deception, manipulation, or betrayal. Some high Machs are good at manipulating, some are not, but having the trait means that the manipulation does occur. Whether or not deception attempts are successful is another thing.

Moreover, varying results make it difficult to really understand the Machiavellian worker. For example, some research has found high Machs to be detached from their job, while other research has found high Machs to be quite involved in their job due to their obsessive compulsive nature (Mudrack, 1989). Also, the differentiation between high and low Machs can be attributed to collective variables. Self-presentation, gender orientation, receptivity to expressive behavior, gender, and self-monitoring have been discovered to differentiate between high and low Machs (Madonna, Wesley, & Anderson, 1989).

Considering the discrepancies in organizational communication research regarding Machiavellian employees, several communication researchers have recently resurrected this program of research. For instance, Walter, Anderson, and Martin (2005) discovered that Machiavellian subordinates are motivated to communicate for control, escape, and relaxation. Furthermore, Teven, McCroskey, and Richmond (2006) revealed that Machiavellian supervisors are perceived as less credible by subordinates.

Based on the extant research, it seems plausible that high Machs will lack an upward mobile orientation and have more of an ambivalent (if not indifferent) orientation for several reasons. First, research does not suggest that high Machs outperform low Machs in real-world organizational outcomes, which does not coincide with the upward mobile orientation. Sales performance (Turnbull, 1976), marketing job performance (Hunt & Chonko, 1984), and professor tenure (Hollan, 1975) are not related to the Machiavellianism trait. Upward mobiles however, are likely to perform better in the workplace considering their desire for promotion. Second, research has suggested that high Machs are not as satisfied with their jobs (Gable & Topol, 1987; Hollon, 1983; Hunt & Chonko, 1984; Walter et al., 2005). Upward mobiles however, live to work and tend to identify with organizations. Instead, workers possessing either ambivalent or indifferent orientations are more prone to job dissatisfaction. Third, communication behaviors exhibited by high Machs are not representative of upward mobility preferences. For example, Teven and Winters (2007) revealed that Machiavellian employees exhibit less caring and responsiveness, which is unrepresentative of the upward mobile employee. On the contrary, an upward mobile employee would be likely to communicate caring and should be quite responsive. Fourth, upward mobility has been correlated negatively with Machiavellianism (Heisler & Gemmill, 1977). Based on the four aforementioned research findings, we predicted that:

H1: *Employees higher in Machiavellianism will have higher ambivalent and indifferent organizational orientations but will have lower upward mobility orientations.*

Nonverbal Immediacy

Nonverbal immediacy refers to “the communicative behaviors used to enhance closeness and reduce physical or psychological distance between individuals” (Mehrabian, 1967). This conceptualization has led to the principle of immediacy which states that “the more communicators employ immediate behaviors, the more others will like, evaluate highly, and prefer such communicators; and the less communicators employ immediate behaviors, the more others will dislike, evaluate negatively, and reject them” (Richmond & McCroskey, 2004). This principle and the importance of utilizing nonverbal immediacy behavior has been verified in the organizational communication literature (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000).

More competent communicators in an organization will use immediate behaviors. Hinkle (2001) discovered a positive correlation between nonverbal immediacy and liking. Immediacy has consistently provided subsequent liking, among other outcomes. For instance, Richmond and McCroskey (2000) discovered that nonverbal immediacy behaviors of supervisors enhance subordinate perceptions of supervisor credibility, attraction, and affect, while increasing subordinate motivation and job satisfaction (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Kay and Christophel (1995) reported consistent results by finding that managers who are more open communicators motivated their subordinates more. Similarly, Slane and Sleak (1978) suggested that perceptions of liking increase when immediate behaviors are used, whereas Teven (2007) discovered that subordinate perceptions of work enjoyment and liking are related to supervisor immediacy.

The importance of nonverbal immediacy within organizations is quite evident and implications of the nonverbal immediacy research are rather simple. From a subordinate

standpoint, having a superior acquire an affinity for a subordinate is a desirable outcome for any organization. Therefore, it is beneficial for subordinates to appear more immediate (e.g., maintain eye contact, use more vocal variety, smile, etc.). It is likely that upward mobile employees will be cognizant of and use immediacy behaviors to enhance coworker affinity because after all, upward mobiles desire to be promoted and the use of immediacy behaviors promotes credibility and liking (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Also, since it is predicted that high Machs will be ambivalents and/or indifferents, then it is less likely that immediacy will be utilized as these individuals do not like organizations and will not communicate in inviting manners to workers within these organizations. Therefore, we predicted that:

H2: *Employees higher in Machiavellianism, ambivalence, and indifference will be less immediate than employees lower in Machiavellianism.*

H3: *Employees higher in upward mobility will be more immediate than employees lower in upward mobility.*

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as the extent to which an individual feels positively or negatively about the internal or external characteristics of her/his job (Hunt, Chonko, & Wood, 1985). There are numerous factors that contribute to an individual's level of satisfaction concerning her/his job. Variables such as management communicator style (Richmond, McCroskey, & Davis, 1982), negative affect (Brief, Butcher, & Roberson, 1995), communication climate (Trombetta & Rogers, 1988), personality (Judge, Bono, & Locke, 2000), communication satisfaction (Pincus, 1986), and leadership style (Madlock, 2008) have been linked to job satisfaction. In fact, job satisfaction, is one of the most widely studied variables in the organizational literature (Brown & Peterson, 1993).

Job satisfaction has typically been lacking for high Machs. Gable and Tople (1987) reported a negative correlation between job satisfaction and Machiavellianism among department store executives, and among discount store executives as well (Topol & Gable, 1988). In another study, they discovered a correlation between Machiavellianism and reduced satisfaction with opportunities for promotion among retail executives (Gable & Tople, 1989). Both Heisler and Gemmill (1977) and Hollon (1983) obtained similar findings. Although a meta-analysis of job characteristics and job satisfaction has suggested that many aspects of jobs influence an employee's overall satisfaction (Loher et al., 1985), it appears that the Machiavellianism trait has reliably produced results which indicate that high Machs are less satisfied in an organization, despite job characteristics. If high Machs do indeed have an ambivalent and/or an indifferent organizational orientation, they should experience less satisfaction considering that work is not their primary concern. Therefore, we predicted that:

H4: *There will be negative relationships between Machiavellianism, ambivalence, and indifference, with job satisfaction.*

Moreover, since upward mobile employees tend to be committed to an organization and perform better, and job satisfaction is related to both commitment and performance (Huang & Hsiao, 2007; Petty et al., 1984), we predicted that:

H5: *There will be a positive relationship between upward mobility and job satisfaction.*

Method

Participants/Procedures

A network sample (Granovetter, 1976) was used as students enrolled in introductory communication studies classes at a large Mid-Atlantic university were given extra credit to administer a survey to employees who worked in an organization. Student recruiters were instructed to distribute this survey to individuals who worked at least 40 hours a week. After several weeks of recruitment, 160 employees (83 men, 77 women) who worked at various types of organizations returned a completed survey. Participants were selected at the convenience of the student recruiters. On a separate form, the contact information of these employees was solicited. Ages ranged from 18 to 67 years of age with a mean age of 29. All participants had a full-time job within an organization. To ensure the validity of the data, undergraduate teaching assistants spot-checked the surveys to make sure the network sample was utilized properly. No problems were observed. Additionally, survey responses remained anonymous and the items on the scales employed were both positively and negatively worded and varied in response formats to avoid problems with common methods variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

The instruments employed were four previously validated research measures: the 10-item Mach Scale (Allsopp, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1991), the Organizational Orientations Measure (McCroskey et al., 2004), the Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report (Richmond, McCroskey, & Johnson, 2003), and the Job Satisfaction Scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1989).

The *10-item Mach scale* assesses the degree to which someone possesses the Machiavellianism trait. It was modified with a Likert response format ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree* instead of the originally forced choice “yes” or “no” format. Reliability coefficients for this scale have been above .80 (Mudrack & Mason, 1995). In this study, a Cronbach alpha of .88 ($M = 25.43$, $SD = 8.09$) was obtained.

The *Organizational Orientations Measure* includes 50 items and consists of three subscales which measure the upward mobile, indifferent, and ambivalent organizational orientations. It uses a Likert response format ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. Reliability coefficients for the upward mobile, indifferent, and ambivalent scales have been reported to be .66, .79, and .91 respectively (McCroskey et al., 2004). In this study, obtained Cronbach alphas were .78 ($M = 70.48$, $SD = 8.09$) for the upward mobile scale, .85 ($M = 35.15$, $SD = 8.75$) for the indifferent scale, and .93 ($M = 48.83$, $SD = 15.32$) for the ambivalent scale.

The *Nonverbal Immediacy Scale-Self Report* is a 26-item measure that assesses the use of nonverbally immediate and non-immediate behaviors. It uses a 5-point Likert-type response format ranging from (1) *never* to (5) *very often*. Richmond et al. (2003) reported reliability coefficients of .90 or above. In this study, the obtained Cronbach alpha was .89 ($M = 95.00$, $SD = 13.18$).

The *Job Satisfaction Scale* is a 5-item measure that assesses the degree to which someone is satisfied with a job. It employs a 7-point bipolar-adjective response format. A previous reliability coefficient for this scale has been .97 (Teven et al., 2006). In this study, the obtained Cronbach alpha was .96 ($M = 25.42$, $SD = 7.08$).

Data Analysis

Pearson correlations were computed for the relationships available among the variables examined in this study (see Table 1). Multiple correlations were computed for Machiavellianism with the three organizational orientations and for Machiavellianism and the three organizational orientations with both immediacy and job satisfaction. Multiple correlations were computed to determine the strength of association between weighted combinations of independent variables (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; p. 69). Finally, a canonical correlation analysis was computed with Machiavellianism and the organizational orientations as one group of variables and immediacy and job satisfaction as the other group. A canonical correlation was used to provide a product moment correlation between weighted linear combinations/canonical factors (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 609).

Table 1 - Pearson Correlations Between All Variables

| | Mach | UpMob | Ambiv | Indf | Nvr |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
| Upward Mobile | -.14* | | | | |
| Ambivalent | .57 | -.28 | | | |
| Indifferent | .58 | -.13* | .68 | | |
| Nonverbal Immediacy | -.42 | -.37 | -.54 | -.35 | |
| Job Satisfaction | -.26 | .25 | -.41 | -.30 | .19* |

Note. * Not significantly correlated; $p > .05$.

Results

The simple correlations among the variables are reported in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between Machiavellianism and the ambivalent and indifferent organizational orientations but a negative relationship with the upward mobile orientation. This hypothesis was partially confirmed. Machiavellianism scores correlated substantially with both ambivalent scores ($r = .57, p < .0001$) and indifferent scores ($r = .58, p < .0001$). While the correlation observed for Machiavellianism with upward mobility was negative as predicted ($r = -.14, p > .05$) but was not statistically significant. The multiple correlation between the organizational orientations and Machiavellianism was strong ($R = .62, p < .0001$).

H2 and H3 predicted that employees higher in Machiavellianism, ambivalence, and indifference would be less immediate than employees lower in Machiavellianism and that

employees higher in upward mobility would be more immediate than employees lower in upward mobility. Both of these hypothesis were supported. Machiavellianism ($r = -.42, p < .0001$), ambivalence ($r = -.54, p < .0001$), and indifference ($r = -.35, p < .0001$) were all found to be correlated negatively with nonverbal immediacy. Upward mobility, in contrast, was found to be correlated positively with nonverbal immediacy ($r = .37, p < .0001$). The multiple correlation between Machiavellianism and the organizational orientations with nonverbal immediacy was strong ($R = .60, p < .0001$).

H4 and H5 predicted negative relationships between Machiavellianism, ambivalence, and indifference with job satisfaction but a positive relationship between upward mobility and job satisfaction. Both of these hypotheses were confirmed. Machiavellianism ($r = -.26, p < .001$), ambivalence ($r = -.41, p < .0001$), and indifference ($r = -.30, p < .0001$) were correlated negatively with job satisfaction. Upward mobility was significantly positively with job satisfaction ($r = .25, p < .01$). The multiple correlation between Machiavellianism and organizational orientations with job satisfaction was substantial ($R = .46, p < .0001$).

Although no hypothesis was advanced prior to the collection of data, it was anticipated that the Machiavellianism and organizational orientations scores would predict the immediacy scores which would, in turn, predict the job satisfaction scores. This test was performed because previous research suggested the possibility that individual differences predict job satisfaction and communication behavior in organizations (e.g., Porter, Wrench, & Hoskinson, 2007). This speculation was not supported by the results obtained. Although nonverbal immediacy was significantly correlated with job satisfaction ($r = .19, p < .05$), this relationship accounted for very little variance (less than 4%). The results drawn from the canonical correlation analysis provides an explanation for this.

The canonical analysis generated only one significant canonical root [$F(2, 140) = 13.07, p < .0001$; Wilks Lambda = .52]. As noted in Table 2, all of the variables analyzed were strongly associated with that root. This suggests that the appropriate theoretical explanation for the results obtained in this research is that the predictor variables (Machiavellianism scores and organizational orientations scores) are direct predictors of the outcome variables (nonverbal immediacy and job satisfaction) with no mediation. This, of course this does not rule out the existence of mediator variables not studied in the present research.

Table 2- Variable Correlation with Canonical Variable

| Predictor Variable | Correlation |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Machiavellianism | -.624 |
| Upward Mobility | .602 |
| Indifferent | -.584 |

maximizing job potential. As Becker and O'Hair (2007) discovered, high Mach workers are largely concerned with impression management and self-serving interests, yet avoid organizational citizenship behavior. Research concerning Machiavellian employees continues to portray this individual difference as undesirable in the organization (although intuitively, one might think manipulation attempts would prove useful in some positions such as sales).

Although these results only provide a minor account of possible individual differences responsible for organizational outcomes, they do however explain a significant amount of variance. Thus, this study provides one example of an existing framework that can be applied to examine the effect of additional individual differences/traits on employee perceptions of communication and satisfaction. However, as Judge et al. (2002, p. 530) noted, "one factor that has impeded explanations of the dispositional source of job satisfaction is the lack of a framework describing the structure and nature of personality." Researchers should carefully choose which individual differences are examined and have a cogent reason for selection. Both Machiavellianism and organizational orientations may be individual differences that warrant further examination in the organizational context.

This study has several limitations. First, the design of the present study does not permit us to determine causation among the variables studied. Second, participants did not represent one company and were not randomly selected. Without random sampling, possible selection biases may have influenced the results. Participant recruitment was based on convenience. Third, the type of organization each participant worked at was not assessed. It is possible that supervisor versus subordinate perspectives could yield completely different findings.

Future research should attempt to determine the causation of the link between organizational orientations and resulting communication behavior. That is, do employees who possess an upward mobile, indifferent, or ambivalent orientation engage in additional communication behaviors within an organization? Does Machiavellianism lead people to behave certain ways in organizations? Do organizational orientations lead people to communicate more or less like Machiavellians? Or, do individual differences and work-related variables produce both of these characteristic orientations/behaviors? Until we have these answers, we only have a very thin theoretical model for explaining how these factors function in the organization communication environment.

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